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SUBJECT: POSSIBLE UN ENVOY ASHDOWN THREATENED IN AFGHAN NEWSPAPER
COLUMN

1) SUMMARY: A recent column in a major Kabul daily compared possible UN Special Representative to Afghanistan Lord Paddy Ashdown to William Macnaghten, the British envoy to Kabul murdered in 1841, during the First Anglo-Afghan War. The column, which detailed British double-dealing in Afghanistan since then, called for Afghanistan to produce a new Wazir Akhbar Khan, the Afghan leader responsible for murdering Macnaghten and hanging his headless body before the Kabul bazaar. END SUMMARY.

2) A December 30, 2007 newspaper column in major opposition daily newspaper "Arman-e-Millie" entitled "William Hay Macnaghten is Coming, Wazir Akhbar Khan Should" reviews British policy in Afghanistan since the First Anglo Afghan War of 1839-42. Taking a deeply negative view of British machinations in Afghanistan culminating with a February, 2007 deal between British forces and tribal elders in Musa Qala, Helmand Province that enabled the Taliban to capture that district, the author opined that Ashdown's tenure would further hinder Afghan progress.

3) Arman-e-Millie is owned by Mir Haider Mutaheer, a close associate of Marshall Fahim, a central figure in the opposition United Front. The newspaper is sympathetic to, but not officially affiliated with, the United Front. Media sources assert that Fahim funds the newspaper.

4) "The appointment of Mr. Ashdown as the UN Special Representative is finalized," wrote the author. "Now the question raised among Afghan people is, with the appointment of a British diplomat with such a background, and considering what the British have done in Afghanistan in the past, what impact will his appointment have on developments in Afghanistan?"

5) While some Afghans express a distrust of British motives given their long history of "Great Game" plotting and invasion, and some minor political factions have expressed displeasure with Ashdown's candidacy, the strident tone of the columnist and the significant stature of the outlet are notable. More notable still is the juxtaposition of Ashdown with the brutally butchered Macnaghten. The columnist concluded, "The arrival of Lord Ashdown ... would not be a good message for the critical year 2008. Moreover, it shows the ineffectiveness of GOA officials in not being able to raise their demands to the international community, especially the United States. Nevertheless, Macnaghten is returning and the people of [Afghanistan] are dead."

WOOD